

NATIONALISTIC ELEMENTS IN FARMING ON THE LAKE PLAINS OF NORTHWESTERN OHIO.

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NATIONALISM.

The population map for Ohio shows that the rural population of Northwestern Ohio is well distributed. (Pl. I, Fig. 1.) The density of population averages for this area 60 per square mile, compared with 163 per square mile for the entire state and 42 per square mile for the United States.

A cursory examination of family names indicates that in the towns and villages the population is well mixed so far as the national origin is able to be identified. Biological mixing occurs more readily in urban areas than in rural areas. In the latter there is evidence of the persistence of nationalistic homogeneity where for example German marries with German, Pole with Pole or Old American with Old American. This may be due either to geographical propinquity or social inertia in choosing the marriage path of least resistance, but the consequences are that certain traits of nationalism are continued and accentuated.

LAND VALUES AND SETTLEMENT.

The Lake Plain counties are rich farming lands. Eleven counties of Northwestern Ohio which compose it in whole or in part contain about 9% of the area of Ohio, yet they hold about 18% of the farm wealth of Ohio. Land values in four counties—Wood, Henry, Putnam, and Paulding, whose soils are almost wholly composed of lacustrine sediments, were appraised on April 1, 1930, at an average of \$104 per acre, which was 25% higher than the average farm value for Ohio. This was the last extensive area of Ohio to be occupied by the pioneer. The swampy character of these plains of low relief (Fig. 2) retarded settlement as long as better lands were available.

LAND USE.

These lands are normally devoted to a regime of mixed grain farming associated with the raising of livestock and poultry. Corn, oats, wheat, soybeans and alfalfa are the principal cultivated crops and are everywhere grown in rotation. In addition 90% of the sugar beets grown in Ohio are produced here. Relative proximity to Toledo and Detroit, thanks to numerous hard surfaced highways and speedy motor trucks, has stimulated truck farming and market gardening. Sandy well drained soils of the old lake beach ridges (Fig. 3) favor vegetable cropping on a large scale. (Fig. 5.) Owing to the tempering influences of the cool lake waters, fruit trees escape the hazards of early budding. Specialized fruit culture, particularly as related to apples, peaches, and grapes, is highly successful on the lake peninsula of Ottawa county—the Port Clinton area—as well as on the valley slopes of the Upper Maumee River. Practically every general farm has an orchard which supplies domestic needs.

THE PIONEERS.

The first efforts made by Europeans and their descendants to occupy the territory in any capacity were made by the French trappers and traders in 1680. English traders began to establish themselves in opposition to the French about 1700.* The earliest farmers were doubtless the descendants of the French and English trappers. Some farmers of Yankee and other old stocks filtered into the area in the decades after the Revolutionary War as part of the "Westward Movement." The well drained lands of the beach ridges were the first to be settled for most of the area was of a swampy nature and heavily wooded.

In the year 1820 the population of the "Lake Plains Counties" was too small to be counted in the decennial census. By 1830 the "Swamp land" Counties—Wood, Henry, Paulding and Putnam—contained less than two thousand persons. In 1860 these contained nearly 45,000 inhabitants. In 1930, a century of population growth showed that these counties contained 113,219 inhabitants. Such population figures indicate that settlement was rapid once the movement for land improvement was started.

*Knapp: History of Maumee Valley. Toledo, 1877, p. 10.

THE GERMANS.

The traveler is likely to be impressed by the large number of people bearing names of obvious German origin. Germans began migrating to Northwestern Ohio at a rather early date. The first settlement in Fulton County was made in German Township in 1834 by a group of Amish Mennonites from Mülhausen in Alsace. The farm lands of this same township in 1932, nearly a century later, are owned almost exclusively by the thrifty descendants of these pioneers. One community leader* said that there is not a farm mortgage in the township. German Township is one of the best corn producing areas of Ohio and is locally noted for the feeding of swine and beef cattle.

The first recorded German settlement in Wood county was made in Perrysburg township in 1852 by a group of Roman Catholic families from Munich in Bavaria. The families were large and the settlement prospered. One historian has said, "They deserve especial credit for they came before the improvement of lands had begun." Other groups of German people came during the decades before and after the Civil War, many from abroad and others principally from German settlements in Pennsylvania.

These German migrants coming into the area later and with meager funds found the unoccupied swampy lands for sale at a relative low price, since the presence of timber and swamp vegetation precluded their use for agriculture. However, these poor lands offered an advantage, for unlike the forested lands encountered by the pioneers in southern and central Ohio, there was a market for timber. Many local hoop mills and stave factories consumed both elm and oak lumber. The shipyards at Toledo bought readily the larger and finer trees of oak.

The German pioneers, as well as others, had a common method of attacking the problem of land clearing and drainage. In general a pioneer bought a few acres of forested land from the state, cleared and drained an acre or two the first year and planted a crop as soon thereafter as possible. With the money received from the sale of the timber, he bought a few more uncleared acres and improved them. He used the proceeds from the sale of the timber and foodstuffs to extend and improve his land holdings.

*A newspaper editor at Archbold, Ohio.

The German farming people were derived generally from the tenant agricultural classes of "The Fatherland." They knew by experience the conditions of hard physical work, long hours of toil, self denial of many things and too, necessary thrift. As a race of pioneers they brought much in physical and mental energy which has been inherited by their descendants. They knew the soil intimately because of the practices of hand-and-knee labor in the homeland. Constant fertilization of soil was not scoffed at by those whose forbears for hundreds of years had been farmers. "Long hours of labor were joyous when they felt certain that it would bring a money reward and as well the pride of land ownership," one of them said to the writer.

Their religion, either Protestantism or Roman Catholicism, taught humility and simplicity in the daily needs, for they of recent European origin had long believed themselves to be destined for a lowly place in society. Religion taught, especially to the Amish Mennonite, a positive injunction against the display of wealth in costly clothes, "showy" furniture, spirited horses or other elements of culture displayed by others. These German folk could without pain put the profits of the farm back into their lands. They built them up until today many of them are model farms and in ordinary times bring more than average financial returns.

In contrast, other farmers of non-Germanic stock are reported to have followed the practice of taking the profits away from the lands until their holdings of similar physical structure have become of nearly marginal productivity. As marginality acts, the German farmers are frequently in a position to purchase these lands and subsequently restore them to productivity of a higher order.

A widespread characteristic among the German farmers as among successful farmers everywhere is the work-plan for doing the repair job needed to be constantly performed on any farm. Among them it is axiomatic to put aside such repair work to be done indoors, such as harness, tool and implement repair, until a rainy day prevents outside labor. Other farmers it is averred, make no definite programs, hence on rainy days when the Germans are accomplishing their repair jobs, the village loafing places are often crowded by farmers of other nationalities.

From observation one can say, and not untruthfully, that nine out of ten neat farmsteads are owned by German farmers, or that nine out of ten sloven farmsteads are not German farmsteads. Characteristic of German farms are well kept, spacious farmhouses, well planted and cropped yards (Fig. 6), large barns well designed and constructed, for the storage of hay and machinery and for feeding indoors large numbers of cattle. (Fig. 7.) The barns generally are painted white with the owners name in large letters conspicuously displayed. The farmyards are in most cases gravelled and clean enough to accommodate a picnic dinner at anytime without offense. The fences and gates reveal an air of farm prosperity. These conditions are not exclusive among the German farmers but are characteristic of them.

POLES.

Polish farmers of the Lake Plains of Northwestern Ohio are found today largely in "the Oak Openings." The "opening" is an area of predominantly sandy surface material which lies west of Toledo in the southwestern part of Lucas County. It extends into southern Fulton County and into northeastern Henry County. It is a heterogenous growth of flora associated with the oaks, generally infertile in an agricultural sense, cleared and kept cleared with difficulty (Fig. 9). It is a land which supports a bare subsistence economy. Most of the Polish people living on these lands are there not because of any special farming ability they may possess, but because economic conditions have repelled them from the urban industries. A few acres of this land offered something of a refuge. The Poles are handicapped in several ways; the land is inferior and the competition of the Germans on the better lands creates an economic hardship from which there is little relief. These Polish people support large families which offer much potential farm labor. With the handicap of infertile land this labor cannot be employed to any special productive advantage. The large family is a consuming family and possibly accentuates the poverty induced by the land.

At most the "Oak Openings" provides very poor pasturage, and equally poor cereals. There is the culture of some melons, berries, grapes and little else. Commercial vegetable cropping has not been satisfactory due to competition of the better

lands. Farm buildings (Fig. 8) seem to reflect the poor quality of the land and holdings are pitifully small in contrast with those of the Germans.

SWISS.

There are notable German Swiss settlements in Putnam County, largely on the Lake Plain. These include prosperous people who have built their lands to a high degree of productivity. The teachings of the Mennonite Church have shown a marked influence here as in German Township in Fulton County, already mentioned.

OLD AMERICANS.

Yankee and other Old American peoples are generally distributed throughout rural northwestern Ohio, but they seem to be less common than those folks of German origin. It is safe to suggest that many of these older peoples have moved from the worn out lands to newer and better lands while others have felt the call to the cities where wages and salaries appealed more than the land. It must be said, however, that many of the descendants of these old families are today eminently successful farmers where they have pursued the methods used by the Germans.

CONCLUSIONS.

From these observations it seems evident that among those people of known national origins in this widespread farming area certain elements have played a conspicuous part in its agricultural development. The inherently good qualities of the German farmer as a soil manager, his willingness to work long hours, the fertility of the newly drained soils, the early initial advantage of the sale of the timber and the good market for the sale of agricultural products have all combined to make his position a secure one and his contribution to agricultural advancement not only of local importance but of value to the state.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE.

- FIG. 1. Population Map of Northwestern Ohio, by Guy-Harold Smith. Courtesy of the Geographical Review, published by the American Geographical Society of New York. The dotted line represents the shores of glacial Lake Maumee, after Leverett, Monograph 41, U. S. G. S. pp. 50-51. The map indicates the uniformity of rural distribution.
- FIG. 2. The Lake Plains comprise thousands of acres of land of distinctly low relief.
- FIG. 3. The "beach" of ancient glacial Lake Maumee rises gradually from the "lake" floor. It is the site of highways and many farm houses.
- FIG. 4. Large drainage canals near Lake Erie are necessary. Capillary water which threatens the farm lands is pumped constantly into these channels.
- FIG. 5. Commercial vegetable growing is characteristic of the sandy soils. (The photo shows a portion of a field of eggplant.)
- FIG. 6. Buildings on most "German-owned" farms carry an air of neatness and reflect thrift. Well planted yards and lawns are common characteristics.
- FIG. 7. Most German farmsteads are well arranged. (The house is shown in Fig. 6.)
- FIG. 8. The farmsteads in the "Oak Openings" are indices of the relative poverty of the soils. These farmsteads are in striking contrast with those of the better lands.
- FIG. 9. Most of the arable lands in the "Oak Openings" are used for pastures which ordinarily have a low "carrying capacity."

